

GLORYING IN THE CROSS

Galatians 6:14

“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (KJV).

In what is a controversial move, the British government, in March 2012, decided to argue at the European Court of Human Rights that Christians do not have the right to wear a cross or crucifix openly at work. The London Telegraph has revealed that members of Parliament “will argue that because it is not a “requirement” of the Christian faith, employers can ban the wearing of the cross and sack workers who insist on doing so.” The Toronto Star newspaper said, “Critics are already calling it another blow to Christianity for restricting its symbols of faith while granting special status to symbols of other religions such as the Sikh turban and kara (bracelet), or the Muslim hijab. The cross is still controversial after over 2,000 years.

On a mountaintop visible from my home, is a cross silhouetted boldly against the sky. It can be seen by thousands of people. It is an ongoing subject of controversy. The opponents of the cross say that it is on government land and is, therefore, a violation of the Separation of the Church and State Act; the proponents say, among other things, that this is a Christian nation and, what the crescent is to the Moslem, the cross is to the Christian.

In the earliest days of the Church, the cross was not only perceived by society in general as an instrument of torture and death, but as a symbol of shame. Controversy about the cross is nothing new. In writing to the church in the city of Galatia, Paul speaks of “the offence of the cross” (Galatians 5:11). The word translated “offence” is from the Greek word “*skandalon*” from which is derived the word “scandal.” It means anything that offends; a stumbling-block or snare; that which puts to shame. The writer of the book of Hebrews said that Jesus “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame...” (Hebrews 12:2).

Sensitive people today would not wear, as a piece of jewelry, an electric chair or a hangman’s noose. Why? They are considered to be “*skandalon*” – an offense; that which is distained by society in general. Just so, in the ancient mind the cross was regarded as we regard those instruments of death. The cross was the most repugnant instrument of death known in Jesus’ day.

However, Jesus beautified the most common things that He touched and He glorified the most hideous symbol known in His lifetime when He was impaled to a cross. It is just like God to take a horrible thing like the cross, and turn it into a symbol in which we can glory. The cross is God’s plus sign – the cross plus Christ is glory—for the cross without the Christ offers no cure!

Yes, “On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross” – and it was there that our blessed Savior allowed Himself to be viciously and vicariously nailed to that old rugged cross, “the emblem of suffering and shame.” Only God could bring glory from such a hideous thing!

Most people today take no offense at the sight of a cross. In fact even some who do not profess to be an ardent follower Jesus Christ, wear the cross around their necks as jewelry,

like many Christians do. It is a testimony to the One Who hung upon the cross, for without the Christ, the cross is a curse!

As Paul, the apostle of the Lord Jesus, thought on this amazing transaction he exclaimed, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." The word translated "glory" is from a Greek word meaning to make a boast, to joy, glory and/or rejoice in that which one values above all else. Paul did not glory in his accomplishments, privileges or successes. He valued Christ and His cross-work above everything else.

When we see ourselves as God sees us, as sinners, we realize that we have nothing in ourselves about which to glory. And when we realize that God has forgiven us on the basis of what Jesus Christ did upon the cross, we can then say, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Cross of Christ is the supreme evidence of the love of God and the center of all God's purposes and plans. It is the cross that is:

- pictured in the Old Testament sacrifices;
- presented in the Gospels;
- preached in the Book of Acts;
- proven in the Epistles, and
- praised in the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, the cross of Christ is:

- The place of a curse and a cure;
- A place of brokenness and of blessing;
- A place of life and of death;
- A place of darkness and light.

In addition, the cross of Jesus Christ is:

- Where "God commended his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8);
- Where "he was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5);
- And, it was at the cross where "I first saw the light and the burden of my heart rolled away!"

Paul says, that is glorious! That ought to be our attitude as well, to find glory in the message of the cross of Jesus Christ. Let's look a little more closely at Paul's words, and notice why we can find glory in the cross and why its message is so vital! In what can we glory as it relates to the cross of Christ? There are at the very least, three paramount reasons to glory in the cross of Jesus Christ. First,

I. BECAUSE OF THE PARDON THAT WAS PROCURED THERE.

"When you were dead in your transgressions He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consist-

ing of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Colossians 2:13-14, NASU).

This is thought to be a reference to an ancient custom by which an obligation was cancelled, by driving a nail through it, and affixing it to a public post for all passersby to see that the debt had been paid.

What did the “certificate of debt” to which Paul refers, consist? What decrees were pronounced against us? There is a list of charges that were against us. The Judge of the Universe has given us a list, anyone of which is sufficient to render us incapable of entering His heaven.

Here is the list:

“As it is written:

There is none righteous, no, not one;
There is none who understands;
There is none who seeks after God.
They have all turned aside;
They have together become unprofitable;
There is none who does good, no, not one.
Their throat is an open tomb;
With their tongues they have practiced deceit;
The poison of asps is under their lips;
Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.
Their feet are swift to shed blood;
Destruction and misery are in their ways;
And the way of peace they have not known.
There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

(Romans 3:10-18)

These are the charges that God had against us - but God reckons them as having been nailed to the cross when Jesus was nailed to the cross and His death paid the sin-debt that we owed, removing the charges against the believing sinner. When Jesus was nailed to that old rugged cross, our debt of sin was nailed to it also and now we can say:

“In the, old rugged cross
Stained with blood so divine,
A wondrous beauty I see.
For t’was on that old cross,
Jesus suffered and died
To pardon and sanctify me.”

That is why we can glory in the cross—because of the Pardon That Was Procured there!

Another reason we can glory in the cross is:

II. BECAUSE OF THE PEACE THAT WAS PURCHASED THERE.

Colossians 1:20 tells us that, *“He made peace through the blood of His cross.”*

I do not need to remind you that “peace” is the opposite of “war” – and God says that, with all

those charges against us, we were His enemies. He tells us as much in Philippians 3:17-19,
 “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their mind on earthly things.”

And, Romans 5:10,

“When we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son...”

“Reconciliation” results in “peace”. There are 2 different aspects to the matter of the peace that God provides:

A. There is the Peace *With* God. Romans 5:1

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Jesus made peace with God for us on the cross when He paid for our sin, otherwise, we could never be at peace with God for we, as guilty sinners, had nothing with which to appease an offended Creator/God.

B. There is the Peace *Of* God.

Paul wrote to the Philippians that “the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

The “peace of God” is that inward assurance and joy that we receive when we personally appropriate by faith the cross-work of Christ for us on the cross.

Illust. We can point to various battlefields on earth where military battles were fought and say, “There is where the decisive battle was fought—there is where peace was won.” However, there is only one place in all the universe where we can point to and say, “There is where peace with God was obtained for me and now I have the peace of God!” And that place is the cross of Calvary! We can glory in the cross because peace was provided there!

There is a 3rd reason that we can glory in the cross:

III. BECAUSE OF THE PERSON WHO IS PORTRAYED THERE.

The identity of the One who hung upon that cross procuring the pardon and providing the peace is unmistakable. He is identified by at least 6 names in relation to His death:

A. He Is The King Of The Jews.

“When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head. And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified” (Matthew 27:29-31).

But He was more

B. He is The Lamb Of God.

“The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ Again the next day John...looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’” (John 1:29-36)

C. He is The Son Of God.

The scene is on Mt. Calvary and Jesus has been impaled to the cross. Matthew 27 records these words:

“Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, ... ‘Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!’ ... ‘Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (Matthew 27:39-41 NIV).

His enemies admitted that He claimed to be the Son of God! But He was more:

D. He is The Lord Of Glory. 1 Corinthians 2:8 - “they ... crucified the Lord of glory.”

E. He is The Prince of Peace. Acts 5:30-31

“The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead-whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince

F. He is The Savior. Acts 5:30-31

“The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead-whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins.....”

King of the Jews, Lamb of God, Son of God, the Lord of Glory, Prince, Savior – what precious names they are that portray the One who died on that “old rugged cross”!

Illust. John Bowring was British statesman and a Christian. Among his achievements was that he was the British Governor of Hong Kong and Queen Victoria knighted him in 1854. Another of his achievements was his testimony in song. He wrote the hymn, “In The Cross of Christ I Glory” in 1825 and the title of the hymn is chiseled on his tombstone in Exeter, England. The words of the first verse of his hymn are these:

“In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o’er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.”

The apostle Paul was a statesman – God’s Ambassador! He said, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” Can we give that testimony today?

Conclusion

Why was Jesus willing to endure the cross despising the shame? The answer lies in the reason for which Jesus came into the world. Luke’s gospel tells us that He “came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). And, Jesus Himself said that He came “not to be ministered unto but to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

Why would He do that? John 3:16 is the well known answer, and that raises this question: Why did He need to come and die for us? Why did we need His intervention? The ugly answer is stated in Romans 3:23 – “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” In

order for sinners to be redeemed, there must be the Redeemer, Who, by His death, would pay the redemptive price. That Jesus did! And now:

- Because of His death we can have life;
- Because of His rejection we can be received;
- Because of His suffering we can have salvation!

Let us thank God for the cross and the Person who died there to provide for us peace and procure our pardon.

The cross story has been told poetically by an unknown poet as follows:

“Hear the Sanhedrin in derision
Casting its infamous decision;
They spat upon Him
And at Him sneered
He whom with humble veneration
Father Abraham revered.

See the Lamb of God most holy,
Beneath His cross ascending slowly
Up the hill from Gabbatha;
Plodding through that weary distance
Bereft of every man’s assistance
Up the hill to Golgotha.

There He hung, reproached, derided,
There His garment was divided
Amongst the mocking soldiery;
There endured He grief unspoken,
There His loving heart was broken,
As He died for you and me.

Oh, how dreary, how distressing
Bosom rending, soul oppressing
Was that terrifying hour
When the Son poured forth His being,
Shed His life’s blood for the freeing
Of mankind from Satan’s power.

Ah, the cross shall be my glory,
All my song and all my story,
For Christ has born the curse for me,
He has paid for my transgression
He has placed me in possession
Of salvation rich and free.”

The message of the cross to the world of Paul’s day was offensive. It was a symbol of weakness, humiliation and defeat. To the Jews it was "a stumbling block". The Greeks, who

prided themselves in being intellectual, also had a problem with the cross for it offended their sense of reason. Therefore, Christ and His followers were objects of derision - they often still are.

Does the cross offend you? If it does, perhaps you have not come to the Christ Who died on that cross and received Him as your Savior. If you haven't, what reason could you give to your Savior for rejecting His sacrifice for you?

Can you say with Paul, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world"?

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***Optional Palm Sunday Introduction**

Palm Sunday is the beginning of what is referred to as the passion week of our Savior, Jesus Christ. When we think about the colt which carried Jesus into the city on Palm Sunday and the cross which He carried out of the city at the end of that week, we realize that between the two events there was a drastic change.

- On Palm Sunday the cry was "Hosanna to the King!" At weeks end the cry was, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!"
- On Palm Sunday He was praised by His friends; at the end of the week He was cursed by His enemies.
- On Palm Sunday He was received; by week's end He was rejected.
- On Palm Sunday He entered the city amidst hallelujahs; at the end of the week He exited the city amidst hisses.
- On Palm Sunday it was the Coronation; the week ended with the Crucifixion.
- On Palm Sunday a colt carried Him into the city; at week's end He carried a cross out of the city.

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